

Spotlight On

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA

Miles tells grads to prepare for 'highs and lows'

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Olympic pole-vaulter Derek Miles had some words of advice for the Vermillion High School class of 2013 – learn to navigate the highs and lows of your life, revel in your victories and keep perspective.

Miles made his remarks as featured speaker in the graduation ceremony that was held in the DakotaDome Saturday, May 19.

An assistant coach for the USD Track and Field Team, Miles competed at the Olympics in 2004 and 2008, and has been ranked in the top 10 pole-vaulters in the nation for 10 years, with four years at the number-one spot.

Miles recalled competing at the World Athletics Final in 2003.

"They invited the top eight polers in the world, and I was lucky enough to make the cut," he said. "It's a prestigious meet. They hold it in Monaco, which is kind of the ritziest of all the places in the world."

Also at the meet was a German named Tim

Lobinger.

"He had a terrible season all year," Miles said. "He never really jumped very high. He just managed to make ... the top eight."

At the event itself, competitors have only three chances to clear the bar, so they have to make them count.

"(Lobinger) comes down there, and in his first shot he actually makes the bar, but his hand hits the bar on the way around, and that's a no-no," Miles said. "You can't upset the bar."

Lobinger was upset, Miles remembered.

"I watched him sit down, and he kind of put his hands over his head and collected himself a little bit," Miles said.

Then Lobinger stood up and tried again. He cleared the bar, and won the event. "What he proceeded to do then was (to take) his pants down and run the entire curve of the track all the way down the backstretch with his butt hanging out," Miles said.

Miles said he learned two things from this experience.

"In life you're going to



have these highs and lows, and sometimes within a very short period of time," he said. "(Lobinger) was able to negotiate what almost would have been the lowest of lows, of making the top and then taking it away from him, but then collecting himself and refocusing, getting fired up and having the highest of highs. And he did that within a matter of five minutes."

The second lesson was a simpler one, Miles said.

"You have to really embrace your victories," he said. "Bask in it, enjoy it and let that be the type of thing that you remember down the road as opposed to things like the scholarship you didn't get, the college that didn't accept you, whatever they are."

The second story Miles told related to his experience at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

"I spent the better part

of that year jumping better than I ever jumped," he said. "Everything seemed to be going my way, and then I go into the games and I have the worst day I could have had."

Miles ended up placing fourth. After he returned home, he still felt frustrated and went for a walk.

"Three blocks down from my house there was a young boy who is confined to a motorized wheelchair, cannot talk, cannot move, literally has to be cared for 100 percent of the time by his parents. I see him all the time, every day," he

said.

Miles said he saw the boy again that day when he went for a walk, and it got him thinking.

"I thought to myself, if this kid can negotiate life and get up every day in that body, why am I whining about the Olympics?" he said. "This story ... is about perspective. I think so many times in life we get so hung up on the thing that's dangling right in front of us, the things we feel are most important."

If the students keep things in perspective, they will be better able to lead a

balanced life, Miles said.

He concluded his comments by advising them to take the same attitude toward working hard that he had in his athletic career.

"I didn't want to look back in 10 years' time and think, 'Man, would I have done something differently? Maybe if I had run a little bit harder. What if I had taken that chance?'" he said. "If you can tackle everything with the idea of, 'In 10 years' time would I have done anything differently?' I think you will find that you have been a success."

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